



Action Area 1: Promote Education and Outreach

Most Americans believe recycling provides an opportunity for them to protect our environment. However, it can be difficult for consumers to understand what materials can be recycled, how materials can be recycled, and where to recycle different materials. This confusion often leads to placing recyclables in the trash, or trash in the recycling bin or cart, contaminating recyclable streams and contributing to the disposal of valuable materials. In addition, the growing number of new materials in the form of products and packaging means that the landscape of recyclable materials is constantly changing. Finally, there needs to be an increased awareness of the importance of buying products containing recycled content and recycling them at their end-of-life. The development of effective, adaptive and coordinated outreach and education strategies for consumers is critical to promoting consistent behaviors that will improve the quality and quantity of materials that Americans recycle. It also will result in stronger markets for recyclable materials and an increase in demand for products with recycled content.

Vision

Clear, consistent messages about proper materials management activities enable consumers to recognize the value of reusing, recovering and recycling materials, as well as the value of buying products with recycled content.

Challenges

Workgroup members identified three key challenges: inconsistent messaging on how to recycle due to localized differences; lack of information on contamination; and increasing public awareness of the value of recycling.

Inconsistent messaging

- Messaging on how to recycle is inconsistent and not nationalized, allowing for regional and local differences in collection and recycling programs and the loss of valuable materials from the recycling system.

Contamination

- Contamination from recyclable products occurs when products are labeled as recyclable but are not supported by infrastructure and/or secondary markets in a specific location. It also occurs when materials are not accepted for recycling at a specific location.
- Materials must continuously be sorted regardless of available markets. The costs versus benefits of managing these sorted materials while waiting for new markets to emerge needs to be better articulated and understood.

Priority Action

Collaborate to develop consistent messages for key recycling issues as a key priority action. Build upon ongoing work and success stories. Include the benefits of recycling, the importance of buying products with recycled content, and preventing contamination of recycling streams.

Public awareness

- Limited awareness about the role of the commodities market in developing better recycling programs, creating industry connections, and educating customers is potentially contributing to the more than \$9 billion of lost revenue when valuable materials are disposed in landfills.
- Similarly, limited awareness by the public on the social and economic benefits of recycling is also contributing to the loss of revenue when these valuable materials are disposed in landfills.

Work Completed Since Signing the America Recycles Pledge

Workgroup Progress on Priority Action

The workgroup agreed to develop a series of consistent messages for key recycling issues. The workgroup determined that the first step to accomplish this task was to compile positive messages already in use by members of the workgroup, representing all parts of the recycling system. The Steering Committee developed four questions to collect information from members of the workgroup: 1) a quote from organization leadership describing why recycling is important to them; 2) data that each organization has on the environmental impact of recycling; 3) data that each organization has on the economic impact of recycling; and 4) data on any material-specific recycling rates each organization might have.

The group collected over twenty responses and evaluated them for any gaps in coverage across the recycling system. Using the collected messages, the workgroup developed two products:

1. An infographic highlighting positive messages about the U.S. recycling system.
2. A compilation of positive messages accessible on the Clearinghouse.

Actions Completed by America Recycles Network

- The Recycling Partnership announced the launch of DIYSigns, a free online resource that anyone can use to educate consumers on what can be recycled in their area. The tool helps anyone develop free customizable posters, labels and signs.
- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, in coordination with the city of Cincinnati, OH announced its Beyond 34: Recycling and Recovery for a New Economy Program would be expanded to Cincinnati. The initiative, piloted in Orlando, FL, aims to develop support materials for a community of any size to increase and improve recycling rates.

Future Actions and Work Underway

Workgroup Actions

- Identify one challenge within the recycling system with limited information, and over the course of 2020, develop messaging resources on that topic. The assembled resources will be made available on the clearinghouse and members of all four workgroups will be encouraged to use the developed messages during the following year.
- Consider if a national public relations campaign is the appropriate mechanisms for spreading positive recycling messages, and if appropriate, identify funding sources for the campaign.

America Recycles Network Actions

- Establish clear and consistent terminology related to recycling.
- Outline the range of benefits for recycling to reinforce its importance.
- Develop public messaging that recycled materials have value, are of good quality, and are not diminished because the materials had a prior life.
- Create programs and publicly-available information to highlight recyclables as valuable commodities (rather than waste), including sustainable materials management and life-cycle analysis.
- Perform an analysis of the successes and failures of various communication and outreach efforts and summarize the results to inform future activities.
- Launch a national public relations campaign to lay the foundation for common messaging.
- Explore the legislative options for requiring the use of recycling labels on products and packaging sold in the United States.
- Conduct education and awareness campaigns, including materials directed at engaging youth.